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## WEEKLY REPORT



# THE SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

7 April 1965

INTELLIGENCE AND REPORTING SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE INTERAGENCY  
VIETNAM COORDINATING COMMITTEE

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# THE SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

(31 March - 7 April 1965)

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THE WEEK IN PERSPECTIVE

The Quat government continues to take modest steps designed to accumulate a record of accomplishments, to increase its prospects of surviving, and to invigorate the war effort. Essentially, government attention has been directed toward strengthening its administrative machinery and popular base, mobilizing additional manpower for the armed forces, tightening security and expanding psychological warfare efforts, and improving its diplomatic posture, particularly in Africa.

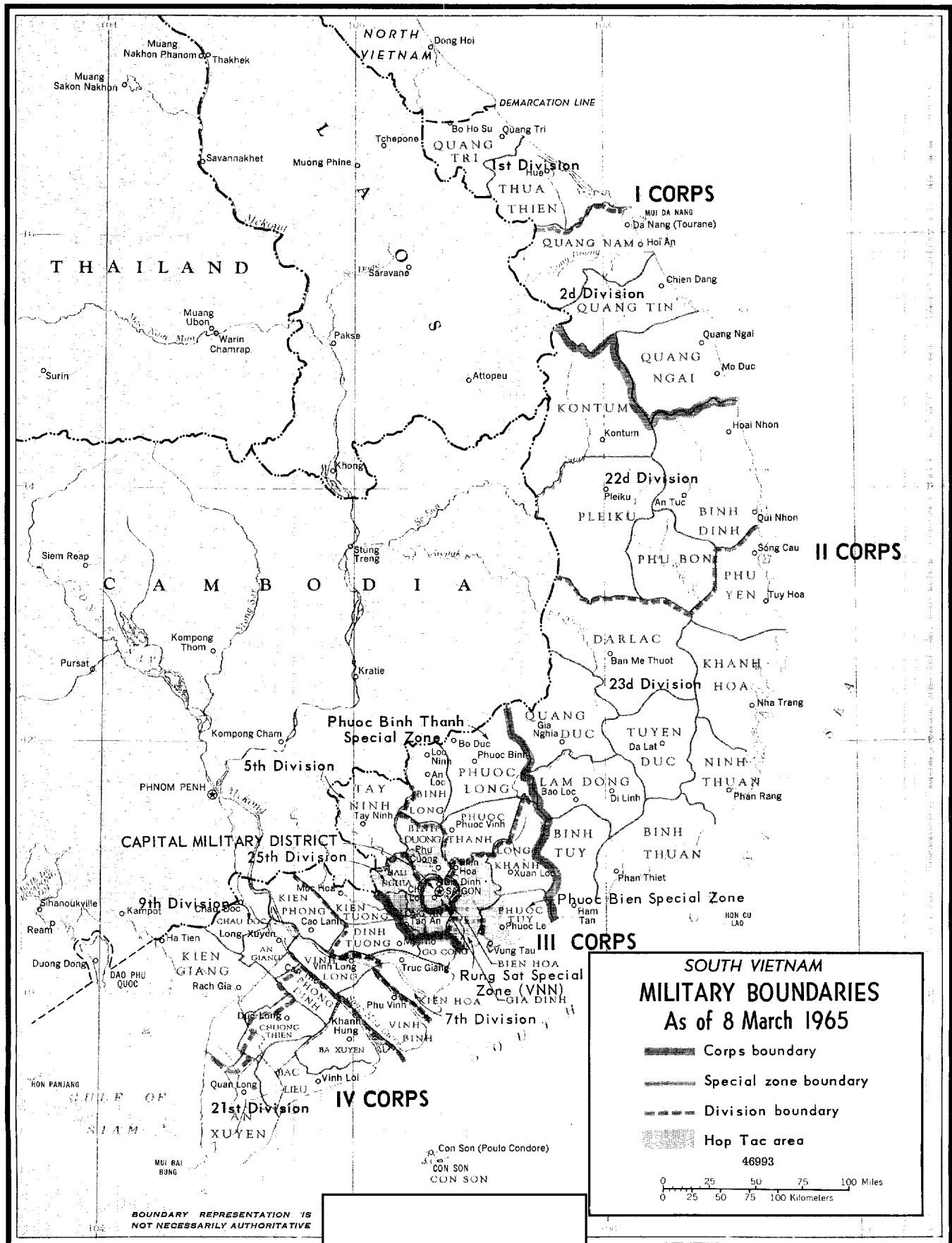
Despite the indications of an improved political climate in recent weeks, and the absence of reports of serious coup plotting, there continue to be indications of rivalries and discontent on the part of various generals over the present uneasy power relationship among them. The internal divisions reflected by these reports have ramifications both of Buddhist-Catholic hostility and military leadership rivalries. For the present, however, the Buddhists are continuing to refrain from overt political involvement and are making some moves which suggest a stronger anti-Communist stand.

The low level of Viet Cong military activity over the past several weeks continues to suggest that the Viet Cong are readying themselves for another major effort. The appearance of People's Army of Vietnam units in South Vietnam could presage heavier Communist attacks and more direct DRV action.

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## I. SITUATION WITHIN SOUTH VIETNAM

### A. POLITICAL SITUATION

1. Premier Quat continues to take a number of modest steps to strengthen his government and to try to invigorate the war effort. In addition to a planned reorganization of pacification and refugee machinery, the government has held a seminar on education and student discipline, and expects to hold a psychological warfare congress this month.

2. Government officials have been urging a strengthened effort to exploit in the psychological field the impact of the air strikes against North Vietnam. In Saigon, the government sponsored a small but publicized demonstration protesting the bombing of the US Embassy. Since the embassy bombing, Quat has also asked approval by the National Legislative Council of tighter legal measures to punish "any action beneficial to the Communists."

3. The government is also moving to crack down on draft doggers as well as to increase the appeal of military service through pay increases and combat promotions. These efforts could have an adverse effect if essential civilian pacification cadres are drafted; exemptions are now being handled on an individual basis and greater efforts are being made to recruit women pacification workers.

4. In the political field, the government intends to establish a press center to handle problems of licensing and censorship and to provide itself a coordinated public voice. New consideration is being given to the feasibility of holding elections for a constituent assembly

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and of establishing elected municipal and provincial councils in secure areas. In an effort to make the government "available to the people," Quat has announced that he is setting aside certain hours to receive complaints and suggestions. In the diplomatic field, a competition has been announced to fill diplomatic and consular vacancies.

5. Despite an apparently improved political climate and the lack of indications of coup plotting, there continue to be reports of discontent and rivalries among various generals. Defense Minister General Thieu is said to desire further command changes to remove certain ambitious officers or suspected tools of the Buddhists. General Minh recently was reported concerned over a possible move to oust him as commander-in-chief--if not by Air Vice Marshal Ky and I Corps Commander Thi then by the Marine and Ranger commanders. Marine Brigade Commander Khang recently complained of Minh's alleged inadequacies in the top military position and implied that Minh would be removed at the next Armed Forces Council meeting. Naval Commander Admiral Cang has criticized Quat's leadership, and Quat in turn has expressed to US officials his disenchantment with what he terms Minh's growing political role and the ambitions of various generals to become new General Khanh.

6. The discord reflected in these comments is further abetted by the clandestine presence around Saigon of the leaders of the February coup attempt, particularly Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao. Both the government and the military appear reluctant to move against Thao, although they appear to desire his exile abroad, lest they trigger some reactions to disturb the present Buddhist-Catholic calm vis-a-vis the government. Thao was most recently reported trying to inform General Khiem, the Vietnamese ambassador in Washington, of his success in cementing relations

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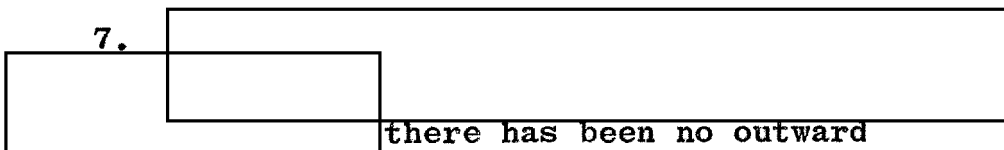
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among the Catholics and the Tam Chau Buddhist faction, and boasting that his plans would produce "better results this time." Although Thao is probably exaggerating his support, particularly among the Buddhists, he remains a source of potential trouble, particularly because of his contacts among junior officers, many of whom reportedly resent the behavior of their superior officers.

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there has been no outward sign that the Buddhists are preparing any new political challenge to the government. In fact, beginning with an official appeal to their youth organizations to be wary of pacifist propaganda, the Buddhist leaders have taken several quiet steps suggesting a more firmly anti-Communist posture. In addition to commemorative services for victims of the US Embassy bombing, they have ordered prayers for a monk who allegedly burned himself to death to dramatize the cruelties suffered under temporary Viet Cong occupation of his hamlet, and for 17 Buddhist notables reportedly kidnaped elsewhere by the guerrillas. Tri Quang has told the US Consul in Hué that instructions are being sent to Buddhists in Quang Nam Province to help them defend the religion against increasing Viet Cong oppression. The Saigon press reports that monk Quang Lien has abandoned his peace movement and may travel to Japan, although Lien himself indicates that he has merely resigned as chairman of the movement. One activity of the Buddhists with which the government now seems inclined to cooperate is the establishment of Buddhist committees in the armed forces and at the provincial and district echelons. Military authorities in I Corps, where Buddhist orientation is strong, reportedly believe that by cooperating, they can place reliable officers on these committees to monitor Buddhist activities and try to channel them into a constructive link with the government.

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8. Following the major terrorist bombing of the US Embassy in Saigon on 30 March--in which two Americans, 19 Vietnamese, and one unidentified national were killed and 52 Americans, 131 Vietnamese, and three French nationals wounded--rumors have circulated in Saigon of impending terrorist attacks on US and South Korean installations. On 4 April, a self-proclaimed terrorist reportedly surrendered himself, claiming that he had orders to blow up the Caravelle Hotel and that another bombing was to be targeted at the USIS offices. One of two terrorists so far apprehended in the embassy bombing is scheduled to face a military tribunal when he recovers from wounds received as he tried to flee the embassy site. A Hanoi Radio broadcast, citing the Viet Cong Liberation Radio, has warned that if this terrorist is executed, US AID officials Gustav Hertz, who was kidnaped by the Viet Cong in early February, will be executed in reprisal. Meanwhile, a temporary stay of execution was granted for another terrorist arrested for carrying concealed explosives on 4 April in Da Nang.

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## B. MILITARY SITUATION

1. The Viet Cong remain in an essentially defensive posture, with the important contacts made through government-initiated operations. Statistically, the level of Viet Cong activity declined last week to the lowest point in 14 months. There were no large-scale actions and only eight small-scale attacks. The 30 March embassy bombing was the most notable action. Of paramount significance was the receipt of evidence, provided by a Communist rallier, that elements of the PAVN 325th Division have been present in Kontum Province of South Vietnam since February. Information thus supplied led to a government-initiated operation which resulted in an encounter between the reported PAVN units and South Vietnamese forces from 26-31 March. MACV accepts this as first identified presence of regular North Vietnamese units in South Vietnam.

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COMUSMACV has tentatively confirmed the presence of one battalion of the 101st Regiment, 325th Division, in the area northwest of Kontum city. The regiment's other two battalions are probably also present in the general area, and less positive evidence indicates that other elements of the same division may be in the mountains west of Da Nang. The rallier claimed that the 101st Regiment participated in operations in Kontum Province during the month of March.

2. Governmental operational activity was generally maintained at the same pitch as the previous week, although there was a marked increase in the number of small-unit actions conducted. The search-and-destroy operation initiated on 26 March, as the result of information provided by a Communist rallier and other intelligence, encountered an estimated two PAVN battalions, in a valley oriented toward the Laotian border, northwest of Kontum city. After making contact, the Ranger battalion was surrounded for two days but managed to slip out intact at night. Government losses were 24 killed, 47 wounded (including 2 US), seven missing in action. Communist losses were reported as 82 killed plus some documents and miscellaneous equipment. Although this operation was not entirely successful, the losses suffered by the PAVN units are significant and the action is viewed as confirming for the first time the presence of organized North Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam. The degree of success was lessened by the inability of the ARVN division to resupply its maneuver element. Rugged terrain and dense jungle foliage made artillery adjustment difficult, and observers were unable to assess the damage of artillery and air strikes. This situation will not improve in the coming months; the rainy season descends upon the mountain highlands in a few weeks.

A three-day operation was conducted in the Quang Tin/Quang Nam border area in a region believed to have contained two Viet Cong main

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force battalions. Airlifted troops came under intense ground fire at the onset of the operation. ARVN units received substantial air support but failed to exploit it, so the results of the battle were inconclusive. This is the second time in a month this regiment has failed to take advantage of air strikes in the battle zone. Government casualties were 23 killed (including two US), 85 wounded (including 19 US) and 20 missing. The Communists lost 70 killed (body count) and an estimated 270 others killed by the air strikes.

3. Despite the low intensity of the war, casualties for both sides increased. Government casualties rose to 685 (189 KIA) this week from 296 (89 KIA). Viet Cong casualties sharply increased to 875 (795 KIA) from 431 (325 KIA) last week. Government forces lost 241 weapons compared to 117 lost the previous week; they captured 198 weapons from the Viet Cong, up from 114 weapons recovered last week.

#### C. RURAL RECONSTRUCTION (Formerly PACIFICATION)

1. Nationwide, "rural reconstruction" activities were generally at a standstill during the past week. Significant gains were reported only from III Corps area. These improvements were, however, confined to two provinces and were largely offset by Communist advances in other provinces of III Corps.

2. The government organizational framework for the counterinsurgency program is being revamped. The Internal Security Council and the Central Pacification Committee are to be abolished, with a new Rural Reconstruction Council assuming most of their functions. General Thieu, in his capacity as deputy premier, will serve as secretary general of the Rural Reconstruction Council, assisted by a newly established executive directorate general. The organization for rural reconstruction at the corps level will be similar to that of the central government body.

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Removal of the term "pacification" from the new organization's title appears to have resulted from Premier Quat's desire to give counter-insurgency operations a new look, and to eliminate a term which has undesirable historical associations in the Vietnamese mind.

The Minister for Social Welfare and the new Rural Reconstruction Council have been given responsibility for the refugee program. Two action committees--one a planning and policy committee with GVN interministerial, USOM, and MACV representation and the other a technical support committee--have been established. Indications are that the former will be responsible for immediate relief activities while the latter will work on a longer range program of permanent relocation. In view of this reorganization, the above committees apparently will handle refugee activities in lieu of the central refugee organization proposed earlier.

3. The refugee problem in I and II Corps was discussed at the joint GVN-US Mission meeting of 2 April. Social Welfare Minister Thuan reported that staff level meetings of the refugee committee had resulted in recommendations for establishing primary and support responsibilities to supplying commercial commodities, transportation, and the warehousing of supplies.

Fifty million piastres have been received for the refugee resettlement program, of which 42 million piastres have been disbursed to the province chiefs and the balance held as a central reserve. Province chiefs, according to Thuan, have been told how to implement refugee programs and to spend allotted funds.

Thuan also reported that because of the improved security situation in Binh Dinh Province the influx of refugees has not been as great as had been expected. He also claimed some of the refugees have moved back to their hamlets and villages as a result of the improvement in the military picture.

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4. There was little progress in the rural reconstruction program in I Corps area during the week. Refugees, now totaling approximately 112,000, remain a major problem although the corps commander has shown little disposition to grapple seriously with it. The senior American advisor to I Corps formally approved a draft refugee relief plan, mainly in an effort to stimulate General Thi's interest in this problem.

A new special sector has been created in the Da Nang area. The sector commander has been given the responsibility for conducting operations in support of rural reconstruction efforts in his area.

5. Increased Viet Cong activity has not only halted rural reconstruction efforts in the II Corps zone, but has caused further erosion of the government position in several areas. Viet Cong incidents appeared to be directed particularly toward New Life Hamlets. Hamlet attacks or harassments were recorded in all II Corps provinces except Phu Yen, Ninh Thuan, and Tuyen Duc.

In Binh Tuy Province, increased Communist pressure has forced the government to abandon the northernmost district of Hoai Duc. Approximately 7,800 people from 21 hamlets are being resettled in the southern part of the province.

Two thousand Montagnards abandoned nine hamlets in the northern part of Quang Duc Province. The present location of these evacuees is unknown, but some are believed to have gone to Darlac Province and others to Cambodia.

In Darlac Province, it was confirmed that nine Land Development Centers, with about 6,500 people, in the northeastern part of the province had been seized by the Viet Cong. The Communists are reportedly consolidating their hold through propaganda campaigns, the establishment of political committees, and the issuance of weapons.

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6. In III Corps, exclusive of the Hop Tac area, progress in the rural reconstruction program was reported from Tay Ninh and Binh Long provinces. Tay Ninh reported 14 hamlets as "completed," while Binh Long reported two more hamlets as meeting the six-point criteria for New Life Hamlets.

Mobile Action Cadres are being lost to the rural reconstruction program in Long Khanh, Phuoc Thanh, Phuoc Tuy, Binh Long, and Phuoc Long provinces. They are either being drafted into the armed forces or leaving the program because of low pay. Some of the affected provinces are recruiting women to replace male cadre losses.

7. No tangible progress was noted in the rural reconstruction effort in IV Corps. Government activity comprised mainly of plans and proposals and minor readjustments of the rural reconstruction organization.

In Binh Long, Kien Tuong, Chau Doc, and Kien Giang provinces, US Special Forces "A" Detachments have been assigned sub-sector advisory responsibilities. A larger detachment of US Special Forces has been given sector advisory responsibility for Kien Tuong Province. These new missions will be performed in conjunction with the units normal border surveillance duties.

8. The Hop Tac area effort is burdened with two problems which are adversely affecting the program. A budget for the current calendar year's program has not yet been approved. Normal operating expenses are being met from advance funds, but no advance funds were available for rural reconstruction projects. The other problem relates to the conscription of draft-age cadres working in the reconstruction program, only half of whom are receiving deferments. Both problems have been referred to the Hop Tac Council for action.

For the first time in four weeks, no hamlets were reported as "completed" during the past week in the Hop Tac area.

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## II. THIRD COUNTRY DEVELOPMENTS

### A. CAMBODIA

Prince Sihanouk, seizing upon recent border incidents in which Cambodians allegedly were killed, has renewed his threat to break relations with the United States at the next such incident. He noted that he had served such warning in November but was renewing it now, rather than automatically breaking relations, both because no Americans were involved with the South Vietnamese forces in the most recent incident and because his earlier warning might have been forgotten. He insisted that there would be no further warnings or postponements.

### B. PHILIPPINES

On 6 April, Philippine Defense Secretary Peralta issued instructions that the second Philippine 35-man medical team would be sent to South Vietnam "within two days, or as soon as possible thereafter."

### C. GRC

The first step toward increasing the GRC psychological warfare advisory effort to the ARVN through the division level will begin with the dispatch of five additional GRC advisors within the next month. Further increment to total 20 advisors will be spread through the next year subject to GVN concurrence.

### D. DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

The GVN is taking the diplomatic initiative to improve its image abroad. The South Vietnamese have announced that their embassy in Ethiopia, established by decree on 29 March but not yet functioning, will also have the responsibility for maintaining contact with other African states

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represented at the Organization of African Unity headquarters in Addis Ababa. Saigon will also establish an information center for all Africa in its Addis Ababa Embassy. Deputy Prime Minister Tuyen plans to head a ministerial level delegation to tour Africa to strengthen GVN diplomatic relations and to lay groundwork for the South Vietnamese position at the Afro-Asian Conference to be held in Algeria in June. Although the exact schedule and itinerary are not yet fixed, it is expected that the delegation will leave within the week for Tunisia, Morocco, Nigeria, the Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, the United Arab Republic, and perhaps Algeria.

#### E. NONALIGNED COUNTRIES

In reply to an appeal by the 17 nonaligned countries for a negotiated peace in Vietnam without prior conditions, South Vietnam reaffirmed its position taken at a 1 March press conference. While the GVN wishes peace restored to Vietnam, any negotiations for this purpose can succeed only if the Communist first show their sincerity by withdrawing their armed units and political cadres from South Vietnam.

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### III. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE BLOC

1. Hanoi called two important meetings this week-- a special session on the Council of Ministers on 4 April and a central committee meeting of the Fatherland Front on 7 April. Both concerned the action North Vietnam is taking as a result of the intensification of US air strikes. The council meeting was addressed by President Ho Chi Minh who spoke of the "new situation and tasks" and received the pledge of the council to support any "new tasks." The council also endorsed the spirit of "self-reliance," while making full use of the approval and support of socialist allies. The public references to the council meeting did not spell out any new policy initiatives but implied that some may have been considered.

Three days later the regime called a central committee meeting of its principal mass organization, the Fatherland Front, to discuss the same problems. The Fatherland Front has been resurrected in the past year to serve as a focal point for expressing Hanoi's support and cooperation with the Liberation Front in South Vietnam. Speakers at the 7 April meeting discussed the entrance of North Vietnam into a "new situation" in which the struggle against US imperialism was "embarking on a new and more arduous period." The theme of "self-reliance," expressed at the Council of Ministers, was echoed at the Fatherland Front meeting as was the unity of purpose between the Vietnamese in both North and South Vietnam in the struggle against the US "aggressors."

2. In what may be an additional effort to emphasize the unity between North and South Vietnam, Hanoi on 7 April appointed a former South Vietnamese resistance leader as foreign minister. This was the first major government change in about two years; involved the appointment of a full Politburo member, Nguyen Duy Trinh as minister of foreign affairs and a Central Committee member, Hoang Anh, to the regime's two top agricultural organizations --the Ministry of Agriculture and the premier's Agricultural Board. Nguyen Duy Trinh is already a deputy premier and has been the regime's principle economic planner; he replaces Foreign Minister Xuan Thuy who is ailing, according to the Hanoi announcement. The official explanation for Xuan Thuy's removal may well be true; he has not represented the Foreign Ministry at official functions for several months. His replacement

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by Trinh, upgrades the Foreign Ministry, bringing a full Politburo member to the post for the first time since Pham Van Dong relinquished it in 1961. The change in agriculture brings both of the regime's top agricultural posts under one man--a prominent central committeeman with considerable experience in financial administration.

3. The US Embassy in Saigon has examined the differences in recent statements by Hanoi, the Liberation Front and Peiping on key issues in the Vietnam situation. The embassy has cautioned against interpreting differences in this propaganda as necessarily a reflection of differences in basic position among the three Communist partners. The embassy believes such differences are more apt to reflect different tactics, local situations, and at times a lack of immediate coordination. Analysis of recent variances between the Front and Hanoi indicates that they are differences of tone rather than substance--the Front's tone being somewhat sharper. This can be explained in part by the Front's desire, under Hanoi's guidance, to maintain the image of a separate identity as well as to offset any decline in Viet Cong morale as a result of the increased US war effort. Hanoi's more restrained and sober handling of the war, however, is basically just as tough as the Front's. The more cautious North Vietnamese approach may be prompted in part by a desire to avoid giving its own people the impression that the war is developing to the point where North Vietnam might be engulfed by invaders. Hanoi's treatment of the war may be due in part also to its wish to maintain abroad an image of responsibility in the face of unjustified aggression and provocation.

Differences between the Chinese and North Vietnamese are sometimes related to the Sino-Soviet dispute. Hanoi is frequently disturbed by the Chinese passion for bludgeoning the Soviets with alleged shortcomings in their support for the Vietnamese. Hanoi prefers to project the image of bloc unity in support of the Vietnamese war and avoids the Chinese campaigns designed to discredit the USSR. The North Vietnamese do not hesitate, however, to be equally as militant as the Chinese in attacks on the US.

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The embassy further cautioned against taking differences between the Front and Hanoi statements as a sign that Peiping is increasing its influence over the Front at the expense of Hanoi. It appears doubtful, at present, that any split exists between the Front and Hanoi. The US Mission has not seen any evidence that DRV control over the Front is anything less than complete.

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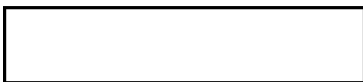
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